

So You Want to Build Your Own eCabinet?

Authors: *Benjamin Meyer*
Dennis Stein

Introduction

"I can do that!" Every time we hear a new user of eCabinet™ utter this phrase, it's music to our ears. When we set out to design an effortless document capture, storage, and retrieval device, we knew we were designing for the busy professional in today's hectic workplace. So we made eCabinet intuitive. Easy-to-use. Effective.

But sometimes we wonder if we've almost made it *too* easy for our customers. Some people may try eCabinet and get the impression that anything this easy to use must also be simple to build for themselves. The truth, however, is that what appears to be simple, is actually the end result of years of complex thinking, development, testing, and manufacturing by the talented engineers of Ricoh Silicon Valley, Inc. If you knew what went into the development of eCabinet, we think you'd understand.

The Platform

To build eCabinet, we needed to find a robust software environment (Operating System or OS) that was open and stable. We chose UNIX because it is very robust and unbeatably solid. If you were to try to build your own eCabinet, then UNIX would probably be a good choice for your system, too. We built eCabinet with a fast Celeron 500MHZ CPU with 256MB RAM and a 2.6GB DVD to back up documents and increase storage capacity. The 30GB hard drive will accommodate approximately 25 million pages of information. When you've finished assembling this platform, you can move on to the next phase.

The Database

Now that you've built a suitable operating system and hardware platform, you'll need a database that not only indexes text, but also understands it well enough to provide access anywhere, at anytime, and via a Web browser front end. We chose Verity for our database due to its scalability, its ability to conduct full or partial word searches, and its portability to a variety of platforms. Once you're sufficiently comfortable with database programming and have implemented your database, we can move on to the next phase.

OCR

eCabinet understands and files documents sent to it because we integrated an OCR (Optical Character Recognition) engine by Caere. OCR engines are not innately intuitive so it may take you some time to understand and program this essential component into your evolving solution.

PDF

When you retrieve a saved document from eCabinet, you view it as an Adobe PDF (Portable Document Format). A PDF enables you to view and print documents with their appearance and format intact. We chose Adobe Acrobat Distiller for this function; it is likely to be the best choice for your system, as well.

Web Access

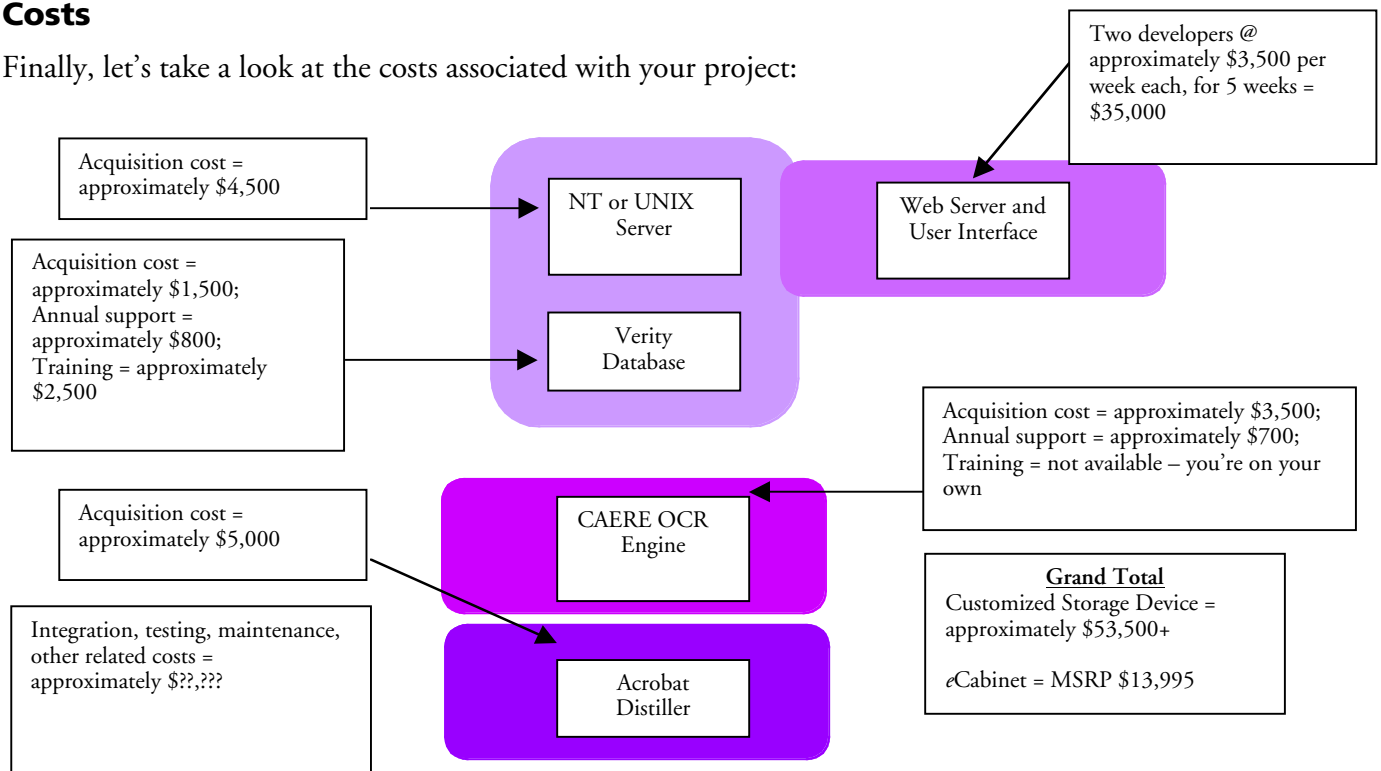
Now for the hard part...remember the Web-based front end we talked about? It is now time to purchase a server and understand it well enough to build a nice, usable front end for your database, PDF and OCR engines. Once you've accomplished this daunting task (expect to spend at least 4 to 6 weeks working with other developers to build this), you're ready to piece all these components together, configure the server, tune it just right, and...Congratulations! You think you've built yourself a network office appliance like eCabinet? Well, let's take a closer look at the performance and reliability of your system to see how it compares to ours. You'll find you've still got a long way to go.

Performance and Reliability

Remember all the engineering time spent in the development, installation, and testing of your system? Well, now that it's complete, you still have to account for its ongoing needs. Unlike eCabinet's ability to *automatically* capture and backup your documents, expect these functions on your system to be time-consuming manual tasks due to the considerable resources that are required to build these components. Then there are always server errors that inevitably result in down time and lost productivity. Of course, you could just purchase an eCabinet and you'd never have to think about such things. Rather than filling a secured room with all the equipment required by a customized system, you could install an eCabinet anywhere on your network, where it will remain always on, and very stable. eCabinet is about the size of a VCR and uses less power to outperform typical document capture and storage devices, either on the market *or* custom made.

Costs

Finally, let's take a look at the costs associated with your project:



So, in summary, now you've built a network office appliance, but you still have to continually monitor, manage, and maintain your own software upgrades to stay abreast of new applications and programs. Wouldn't it be easier to just buy an eCabinet?

eCabinet. We've made it simple...for you.

eCabinet

One Hundred Engineers Spent Two Years Building It For You To
 Save Everything. Find Anything.